

# Committee on Resources

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## UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

#### SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

#### THE HONORABLE KEN CALVERT, CHAIRMAN

#### H.R. 901, AUTHORIZING A NEW BRIDGE AT FOLSOM DAM

#### TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE ROGER NIELLO

#### SACRAMENTO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

April 1, 2003

MR. CHAIRMAN and distinguished members of the Sub-committee, my name is Roger Niello, and I am a member of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors representing the communities in Sacramento County surrounding Folsom Lake. I am honored to be here in support of H.R. 901, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to construct a bridge on Federal land west of and adjacent to Folsom Dam in California.

I join my friends and colleagues invited to testify today in thanking you and the members of the Subcommittee on Water and Power for holding this hearing this afternoon. This is truly a critical project, and we cannot do what needs to be done without federal involvement. Sacramento County also recognizes the hard work and dedication exhibited by Congressman Doug Ose and Congressman John Doolittle on this issue. We truly appreciate Congressman Ose's and Congressman Doolittle's commitment to securing the new bridge and doing so in a fiscally responsible manner. Their legislation recognizes the present day realities of the impact of the closure of Folsom Dam Road on regional transportation and air quality issues, and we appreciate their leadership in taking on this necessary project.

We urgently need the bridge authorized by H.R. 901 to mitigate the impact of closing Folsom Dam Road to ensure security at Folsom Dam and Folsom Reservoir. This new bridge is essential for the economic stability of our region. While the decision by the Federal Government to remove automobile traffic from Folsom Dam was driven by perfectly justifiable security issues, the impact of this decision has severely affected the region I live in. Mr. Chairman, I strongly support this legislation and I urge you and your colleagues to act speedily on H.R. 901 to make certain the bill is passed and signed into law as soon as possible.

I am here to provide a regional perspective on the impacts of closing Folsom Dam Road. As a local businessman, I know quite a bit about the power of our regional economy. As a public official I have learned the importance to our public safety and economy of a viable water supply, a reliable energy grid, and a functioning transportation system. I also serve on the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, so I am painfully familiar with our vulnerability to flooding and the devastating impact a major flood would have on Sacramento and on California. And I do not believe it is hyperbole to suggest that a major flood in Sacramento coupled with the immediate loss of a major water and power supply would have a significantly damaging impact on our national economy. Simply put, the triple whammy impact of a catastrophic failure of Folsom Dam would be beyond devastation. I fully understand the decision to close Folsom Dam Road, but that decision has some real and immediate impacts.

The communities surrounding Folsom Lake depended on the Folsom Dam Road to provide a vital transportation link for the movement of people, goods and services. Over 18,000 cars per day utilized Folsom Dam Road to cross Folsom Lake. Folsom Lake provides a physical barrier to travel for the surrounding communities. In particular, the communities in El Dorado County must, for the most part, leave El Dorado County for employment. In particular, the traffic pattern from El Dorado County to South Placer County requires the crossing of Folsom Lake. The ability to utilize Folsom Dam Road enabled this traffic to skirt the community of Folsom. With the closure of Folsom Dam Road, all of that traffic is now forced to utilize surface streets in Folsom, directly impacting that local community. We have major traffic congestion and air pollution problems locally and regionally that are exacerbated by the closure of Folsom Dam Road. The bridge and linkages provided by H.R. 901 will provide significant congestion relief upon completion and

also anticipate and address future growth in our region.

I also agree with my colleagues on the panel that good planning requires the new bridge to be a full-service, four-lane bridge. Congressman Ose's and Congressman Doolittle's legislation properly requires that the bridge be designed and constructed with appropriate sizing and linkages to support present and future traffic flow requirements for the City of Folsom and the adjacent Sacramento County, Placer County and El Dorado County communities.

As I stated in my testimony before this committee on this issue last April, flood control is always controversial in our region. It is important to point out, though, that this legislation has absolutely no prejudicial effect on the flood control debate. The new bridge will provide transportation and air quality benefits, and will do so without biasing the flood control debate or outcome. As I mentioned, I am a member of the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. As a member of that Board, I am on record as supporting both the "mini-raise" as well as the Auburn Dam. With the closure of Folsom Dam Road, a replacement for this vital transportation link needs to be provided, regardless of which project or combination of projects is approved and constructed. In fact, now that the Dam Road has been closed the bridge becomes a need independent of the flood control project. It is now not just contingently needed due to a desired flood control project; it is unconditionally needed due to the actual permanent closure of the Dam Road.

One of the reasons cited in opposition to having the department of the Interior construct this bridge is that the Department of the Interior is not in the bridge building business unless it is a part of a project such as the "mini-raise." Setting aside that particular debate, it is my contention that the construction of the proposed bridge is the "completion" of the original Folsom Dam project. It is my understanding that the legislation that originally authorized Folsom Dam included a commitment to replace the bridge lanes that were flooded upon that project's completion. The utilization of Folsom Dam Road provided at least partial replacement for those lost cross-river access points. With the closure of the Folsom Dam Road, the replacement of that access has been removed. The bridge proposed in H.R. 901 would be a permanent replacement for this lost access. It is not only appropriate to have Interior build this bridge, but also it is a logical conclusion to the Folsom Dam project.

H.R. 901 is the right legislation at the right time. The Sacramento region is in desperate need of additional flood control improvements and it is making progress towards that goal. While I support moving forward on our regions flood control protection, I also recognize that that process is ongoing. Additionally, our region has adopted a balanced transportation plan that invests in the needed infrastructure of our roadways and transit systems. For this part of the Sacramento Region, those communities surrounding Folsom Lake, there is not another more vital single project. The construction of the bridge and the flood control improvements, with the closure of Folsom Dam Road, are now, independent of each other. What is not separate is the real physical barrier that Folsom Lake presents to local traffic circulation.

One final point on the impacts to local businesses by the closure of Folsom Dam Road. When one of the Dam's gates failed in 1996, Folsom Dam Road was closed for a period of several months. It has been reported to me by the Folsom Chamber of Commerce that 38 businesses failed in Folsom due to the impacts of that road closure. I am fearful that there could be a repeat given the impacts of the permanent closure in our current economic environment.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing and giving my colleagues and me from the Sacramento Region the opportunity to appear before you today. We also again wish to thank Congressman Ose and Congressman Doolittle for all their work on this legislation and on behalf of our community. I urge the Subcommittee on Water and Power to report favorably on H.R. 901 as soon as possible. This concludes my formal statement, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Again, thank you.

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